



# Ashington Parish Council

## ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

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**Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting**  
**held on Thursday 13th March 2025 at 7.45 p.m.**  
**Ashington Community Centre, Foster Lane, Ashington**

**Present:**

**Councillors:** N. Carter, P. Howie, T. Kearney, P. Kerrey, G. MacPherson, M. Meldrum, J. Morris, T. Moss, L. O'Reilly, B. Wallace, M Woolley

**Also present:**

**Horsham District Councillor:** Philip Circus and Alan Manton

**Members of the public:** 6

**Minutes taken by:** Parish Council Clerk Lee English

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1. **Welcome from the Chairman of Ashington Parish Council**
2. **Apologies for absence**  
County Councillor: Paul Marshall
3. **Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting 14th March 2024**  
The minutes were **APPROVED** by all.
4. **Report from the Chairman of Ashington Parish Council for the Year 2024/25**  
[Appendix 1](#)
5. **Report from County Councillor**  
None received
6. **Report from District Councillors**  
Cllr Circus reported -
  - Planning is still a concern, particularly the Local Plan. HDC still await a letter from the Government Inspector to highlight what was considered “wrong” with the draft plan.
  - There is no 5 year land supply.
  - There has been a review of the constitution, although it could be considered a waste of time given that HDC will not exist by 2028.
  - There is a proposal to change the existing 2 Planning Committees (North and South) to 1 Committee for the whole District.

- Government is looking to change the law to reduce the size of Planning Committees and therefore reduce the opportunity for local councillors to have a say on local planning matters.
- Local Government Reorganisation – discussions are starting with parish councils to discuss transfer of District assets, before they go to the new Unitary Authority. Possibility that parish councils may combine to make “super” parish councils.
- HDC now operates from new premises at Albery House, Springfield Road, Horsham.

Cllr Manton reported -

- It was noted that the government had highlighted the Unitary Authority process, with parish councils being the local face, and with no District Councils at all.
- It was likely that parish councils would take on more responsibilities.

## 7. Public participation

Questions and issues raised –

- **The precept** is being raised by 25% - will a new Unitary Authority take any “surplus”?
  - A resident’s council tax bill is made up of various elements including the parish council element (precept) which is approximately 5% of the overall bill received. Other elements include District, County, Police Commissioner. The 25% increase only relates to the parish element, not a 25% increase of the total council tax bill. There is not a surplus, more that the budget needed to be balanced. The precept was not raised at all in the previous 7 years. Cost of living, and council costs, had gone up in those 7 years and council reserves were decreasing year on year to balance the budget, and this was no longer sustainable, hence the need to raise it this year. In the previous year, one area that had impacted all councils was the increase in employer NI rates, which affects the Clerk’s and the 2 Neighbourhood Warden’s salaries.
- **Wardens** – are they value for money?
  - This was the reason for a review to be undertaken. Some of the initial reasons for their introduction have changed over the years. It was noted that some of the work undertaken is intangible and doesn’t necessarily show, until it is taken away. The last consultation was undertaken in 2010, hence why a review is due. The Wardens are not a substitute for the Police, but they provide a useful service.
- **Wardens** – reports / who employs them? It was felt that reading the reports submitted each month, was not reflected by what was seen in the community. The resident had not seen the Wardens walking round the village.
  - They are employed by HDC who have total operation control. The parish council can set priorities.
- **Meetings** – It was felt that meetings were not interesting enough and were very procedural.
- **Village** – It was felt the village was not as vibrant as other local villages, and residents go elsewhere for activities. It was felt parish money was not being used purposefully for the village.

- **Ashington Community Centre Trust (ACCT)** – The Chair of ACCT thanked the council Chair for his earlier comments. He reiterated the aim to continue working together, to continue to improve relations, to identify projects and increase facilities and amenities to the village.
  
- **Development at Chanctonbury Nurseries** – Residents are concerned about rules regarding lorry movements and work at weekends. The state of the pavements was raised as an issue, particularly as children walk to school along there. Are there rules in place to address this?
  - There will be, but the council hasn't seen them yet. The local authority will put in place Construction Traffic Management Plans to control those movements, times of movement, numbers of vehicles permitted etc.
  - It was noted that the council have been raising the issue of access from Penn Gardens to the village for some years, but little progress has been made with WSCC.
  - It was noted that it is beneficial also if residents raise issues with WSCC to reinforce those issues.
  
- **Penn Gardens** – had been waiting 3 years for WSCC to clear the footpath.
  - It was acknowledged that it was an ongoing problem. It was noted that the new developments would provide better access routes through to the school and central facilities.

The Chairman thanked all present and closed the parish meeting at 8.40pm

Signed ..... Dated .....

## Appendix 1 – Chair’s report

### **Report from the Chairman of Ashington Parish Council for the year 2024/25**

This is my first Chairmans report after assuming the Chair 10 months ago.

I have come to accept that the parish council is often a much misunderstood and maligned organisation. Rarely a week goes by without comment about ‘what is the parish council doing about.....’ To our critics I would like just take a moment to address this criticism. In some cases it is a fair observation, but equally it’s worth taking a moment to balance that.

The council has one part time employee - our Clerk who has the unenviable task of not only advising the council as its ‘Proper Officer’, scheduling and minuting our meetings; acting as the Responsible Financial Officer and handling the day to day business of the council as well as responding to requests from councillors and members of the public. If the role of the parish council is often misunderstood, then the role of the Clerk is even more prone to misunderstanding - not an administrator, but the duly authorised representative of the Council which itself is a public body.

The parish council is made up of 11 councillors all of whom are volunteers who give up their time trying to do the right thing for the village.

Whilst our councillors are entitled to claim an allowance for their service, all of our councillors have voluntarily agreed not to take their allowance and instead make that money available to the parish. This increases the money the parish has available to spend by around 4% and demonstrates a selfless commitment putting the needs of the parish above their own interests.

Being a parish councillor can often be an unenviable task and sadly during this year, two of our councillors, Councillor Nigel Spiers (Chairman) and Councillor Sam Ball, (Vice-Chair) both resigned from the council having served for a considerable length of time. This, coupled with an existing vacancy created by the sad death of Councillor Judith Stilwell, a very longstanding member of the council, created three vacancies. During the year we have co-opted three new councillors; Councillor Marcus Meldrum, Councillor Penny Howie and Councillor Liam O’Reilly who have all stepped forward to fill the gaps and who I am pleased to welcome to the council.

In June when I took on the role of Chair; Councillor Phillip Kerrey stood up to serve as my Vice-Chair. In preparing the report and looking back over the last year it becomes apparent just how much work really goes into delivering the business of the parish council. I’d like to highlight a few examples.

**1. Budget Management.** Last year the Finance Committee developed a financial strategy to optimise the benefits received from investing our reserves. A lot of effort, particularly on the part of the Clerk, went into setting up a variety of accounts and funds but the net effect of these efforts has begun to be realised this year with over £10,000 per annum (at current rates) of interest generated through the present investment of our reserves to offset costs.

**2. Youth Club.** The Parish Council has provided support to our village Youth Club for the last three years during which time they have grown and flourished, providing a valuable service to

the young people of the village and beyond. We are pleased have been able to provide financial support to the youth club for a further three years.

**3. Relationships with Ashington Community Centre Trust (ACCT).** Historically relationships between the Parish Council and the Ashington Community Centre Trust have been best described as fractious. However, recently there have been signs of a thawing in Ashington's 'Cold War' brought about in no small part by the efforts of Chris Wood, the Chair of the Board of Trustees of ACCT who together with his trustees have worked with the Parish Council over the year to help improve relations - the most tangible and visible sign of progress being the fact that we now hold all of our Parish Council meetings, and most of our committee meetings in the community centre. Thanks go to Chris and his team for that.

Both organisations have a duty to work better together and must be able to put past differences aside in the interest of our wider community. We both still have some way to go but there are challenges and opportunities on the horizon that we will need to overcome, and we will be better able to address these if we work more closely together. My thanks also go to Councillor Nikki Carter for her work as the Parish Council's observer at ACCT board meetings and unofficial 'peacekeeper'.

**4. Community Warden Scheme.** Ashington has funded a successful community warden scheme for several years however costs of delivering the service continue to rise and the scheme now accounts for over 50% of the parish expenditure each year and is our single largest expense.

Whilst it is clear the Warden scheme adds value to the village we must review both the scheme and its costs to ensure it continues to deliver best value for the village and that it supports local priorities. To achieve this we have established a deep dive review to look at the scheme and make recommendations based on the views of the community.

**5. Enhancing the Environment.** A key part of the Parish Council's work has always been the maintenance and upkeep of the public open spaces in the village. One very visible sign of this is the village hanging baskets on display during the summer months, but maintaining the public open space involves much more than hanging baskets.

Much of the day-to-day work is ably and diligently delivered by Mark Adsett our grounds maintenance contractor. As the village matures, so too do the open spaces and we are now having to undertake extensive works to maintain our open spaces including work on our ponds. In addition to Mark's efforts, a number of councillors have championed a range of 'green issues' that enhance the environment and encourage biodiversity these include wild flower planting, installation of Swift boxes and Owl boxes to encourage nesting and Hedgehog awareness activities with the School. All contributing to maintaining and enhancing the village environment.

**6. Voluntary activity.** In addition to Council business a number of our councillors also contribute time and effort voluntarily to schemes which benefit the village. Of note is the community Speedwatch scheme operated by Councillor Philip Kerrey. It directly addresses a longstanding community concern around speeding on rural roads. This information is fed directly to Sussex Police to provide intelligence which will be helpful in the future to highlight road traffic issues.

Cllr Kerrey, along with resident Nik Ball, also find the time to volunteer to conduct our playgrounds and skate park inspections ensuring they are safe, and any damage promptly repaired.

**But there are challenges too ...**

**Highways issues** continue to be an area of concern. I recently stumbled across the Parish Plan for 2010 and it is notable that ALL of the highways issues that were of concern to the village 15 years ago remain issues of concern with very little evidence of progress

- Improve parking on Church Lane / Foster Lane
- Develop options for residents of Penn Gardens to access the village
- Review the opportunities to resurface unadopted roads in the village
- Reduce speeding on residential village roads
- Reduce School run traffic
- Improve bus services to / from the village

To this list we can add -

- Parking / traffic management on London Road and Rectory Lane
- Flooding / poor drainage in several parts of the village

The lack of progress is particularly frustrating when WSCC have been allocated over £65,000 in historic S106 monies for Traffic Management schemes from Ashington Developments and have recently announced their intention to 'reallocate these unspent funds as the schemes have not progressed'!

The complete lack of engagement has been staggering and my single biggest frustration. Despite the efforts of our County and District Councillors, this continues to be an area of concern.

**Development & planning** - In the last year three large developments have been the focus of Parish Council Attention. Whilst the Parish Council has no direct control over planning it can lobby the planning authorities to influence decision making and our efforts can and do make a difference.

**Hooklands Farm** - Although not technically in the parish, the proposal to import 'inert' waste would lead to significant heavy traffic accessing the site from the northern roundabout for several years. Strong objections have been lodged by the parish council and our County Councillor - we await the outcome.

**Chanctonbury Nurseries** - This application forms part of the Neighbourhood plan development and will see 75 houses built on the former nurseries site. Planning permission has been granted and site clearance has taken place ahead of the start of works expected soon. This is the first site to be developed since our Neighbourhood plan was made and as a result the Parish receives directly 25% of CIL monies from the site (compared to 15% if we did not have a plan). As a result, we have recently received the first instalment of money from this development which will also deliver community benefits on site.

**Land West of Ashington School** - The second site in the Neighbourhood Plan has consumed considerable amounts of parish council time. The development will deliver over 150 houses to the west of the village and several community facilities, however it has not been an easy

journey. The parish council have raised significant objections and by raising awareness across the village stimulated over 200 objections from residents. As a result, these efforts have prompted major changes to the proposal. Negotiations still continue as this application progresses to approval. The parish council continue to monitor and represent the views of the village.

**Finance** - Despite the efforts of our Finance Committee to balance our budgets it has been necessary to increase the parish precept by 25% for 25/26 to be able to continue to deliver the projects and initiatives I have outlined. In real terms that is an increase of approx. £15 per household.

Whilst this is an unwelcome rise, it should be noted that all the actions of the council as described, is funded through the parish council precept, and at a cost of an average of £120 per household per year I think the Parish council delivers a lot and represents value for money. As approx. £50 of that is contribution towards the Warden's Scheme, what the council is delivering on the balance of the budget is staggering, and is due to the efforts of those on the council.

**Support** - We have been fortunate to have received excellent support from Councillor Phillip Circus and Councillor Alan Manton at Horsham District Council and from Councillor Paul Marshall at West Sussex County Council who have always found time to support the village and understand our concerns - Thank you

Looking back over my first 10 months as Chair of the Council I am proud of what we have achieved. There has been a lot of change within the council itself; that has not all been introspective, there have been a lot of positive things done for the benefit of the community. That is testament to the efforts of a committed team of willing volunteers prepared to stand up and make a difference for their community.

There will always be those who say we should be doing more - but given the time and resources we have available, I think we have done well, and are well set to continue to deliver for the community going forward. We aren't going to rest on our laurels as I think there is more we can and should be doing, and as we push forward into the next year, I'm confident the councillors will rise to the challenge and do our best, within our means, to do our best for the community.

Graeme MacPherson Chair  
Ashington Parish Council